

ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESEARCH-SET ASIDE TO SUPPORT RESEARCH IN CERTAIN MID-ATLANTIC FISHERIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name(s):** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce
- **Funding Opportunity Title:** Request for Research Proposals supported under a Research Set-Aside Program
- **Announcement Type:** Notice of Request for Submission of Research Proposals for certain Mid-Atlantic Fisheries for Fishing Year 2005 (January 1, 2005-December 31, 2005)
- **Funding Opportunity Number:** 2005 Mid-Atlantic Research Set-Aside Program
- **Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:** 11.454, Unallied Management Projects
- **Dates:** Full proposals must be received by 5 p.m., eastern standard time, on April 8, 2004.
- **Funding Opportunity Description:** NMFS announces that for fishing year 2005 the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) may set aside up to 3 percent of the total allowable landings (TAL) in certain Mid-Atlantic fisheries to be used for research endeavors under a research set-aside (RSA) program. The RSA program provides a mechanism to fund research and compensate vessel owners through the sale of fish harvested under the research quota. Vessels participating in an approved research project may be authorized by the Northeast Regional Administrator, NMFS, to harvest and to land species in excess of any imposed trip limit or during fishery closures. Landings from such trips would be sold to generate funds that would help defray the costs associated with research projects. No Federal funds would be provided for research under this notification. NMFS is soliciting proposals for research activities concerning the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, Loligo squid, Illex squid, Atlantic mackerel, butterfish, bluefish, and tilefish fisheries. NMFS and the Council will give priority to funding research proposals in the following areas: (1) Bycatch and discard reduction; (2) mesh and gear selectivity; (3) fishing impact on habitat; (4) cooperative stock assessment surveys; (5) improved recreational fishery data; and (6) other research relevant to the Mid-Atlantic fisheries as further discussed in the full funding opportunity announcement.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Research Set-aside (RSA) Program provides a mechanism to fund research and compensate vessels through the sale of fish harvested under a research quota. For fishing year 2005 (January 1-December 31), NMFS announces that up to 3 percent of the total allowable landings (TAL) in certain Mid-Atlantic fisheries may be dedicated to research endeavors under a research set-aside (RSA) program. The setting of the actual RSA quotas will be the subject of future rulemaking. NMFS is soliciting proposals for research activities concerning the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, Loligo squid, Illex squid, Atlantic mackerel, butterfish, bluefish, and tilefish fisheries. The award of a set-aside from the TAL of selected species became possible with the approval of Framework Adjustment 1 (Framework 1) to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish; Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass; and Bluefish Fishery Management Plans (FMPs); and the RSA provisions of the Tilefish FMP. Framework 1 established a procedure through which RSA amounts would be set annually as part of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) quota-setting process. The set-asides may range between 0 and 3 percent of each species' TAL. The set-aside allocated for a given species is to be utilized primarily for research involving that species. However, to promote research in those cases where it would otherwise be infeasible, individual research projects may involve allocations from the set-asides for several of the species listed in this notice. Therefore, in addition to, or in lieu of, applying for part of the set-aside involving a species directly involved in a research project, applicants may also apply for up to 25 percent of the RSA quota for species not directly involved in a particular research project.

B. Program Priorities

Projects funded under an RSA allocation (or award) must enhance understanding of the fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. Research, as well as additional fishing voyages to obtain fish for compensation, may be conducted, as specified in the EFP or LOA, as applicable, in or outside of a closed area, within the time frame of a commercial quota closure, and onboard a fishing or other type of vessel, including recreational and/or commercial vessels.

The Council and NMFS will give priority to funding research proposals in the following areas identified as research priorities by the Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) for the 2005 fishing year (not listed in order of priority):

1. Bycatch and discard reduction concerning: (a) Distinctions between regulatory discards and bycatch attributed to gear, including mesh selectivity and/or overall gear design in the summer flounder fishery; (b) gear modifications in the Loligo squid fishery to reduce scup and

other species bycatch; (c) discard studies in the Loligo and scup fisheries; (d) better estimates of recreational discards in the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries; (e) ways to decrease discards associated with increases in size limits; (f) gear modifications in the scallop fishery to reduce bycatch of summer flounder; or (g) studies on incidental catch and discard mortality of spiny dogfish in the directed fisheries of other Mid-Atlantic framework species, with emphasis on the following gears: Gillnets, trawls, and hook and line.

2. Mesh and gear selectivity focusing on: (a) The examination of summer flounder catch composition in small-mesh net fisheries within the summer flounder small-mesh exemption area; (b) summer flounder mesh selectivity studies; (c) scup mesh selectivity; (d) squid mesh selectivity; (e) black sea bass mesh selectivity; (f) the development of threshold triggers based on gear and fishery characteristics; (g) evaluation of various pot vent sizes and shapes for black sea bass and scup; (h) estimation of mortality of black sea bass left in pots during the closed season; and (I) mesh retention studies of 2 ½-inch (6.35-cm), 2 ¾-inch (6.99-cm), and 3-inch (7.63-cm) mesh for butterfish.

3. Fishing impacts on habitat pertaining to: (a) Mobile gear impacts on tilefish burrows; (b) scup spawning areas and scup larval settlement areas in coastal/estuarine waters; (c) benthic habitat of juvenile and adult black sea bass, and scup offshore wintering areas; (d) mapping of spawning areas and egg mop areas for Loligo squid; and (e) further delineation of essential fish habitat (EFH), particularly in nursery areas for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass, as well as the potential for possible gear impacts to this EFH.

4. Cooperative stock assessment surveys focusing on: (a) The use of alternative industry assessment methods to determine abundance of Atlantic mackerel; (b) the summer flounder fishery; (c) surveys for summer flounder in areas not traditionally sampled by NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) gear; (d) side-by-side comparisons for summer flounder and scup of commercial and NEFSC survey gear; (e) better survey information for bluefish; (f) tagging studies of bluefish movements; and (g) DNA analysis for stock descriptions of Atlantic bluefish and Atlantic mackerel.

5. Improved recreational fishery data focusing on: (a) Research to enhance the overall knowledge of the recreational fishery; (b) statistical models to evaluate the effectiveness of recreational management measures and/or data collection process; (c) studies of bluefish, summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass hooking mortality by size of fish and the compliance with the regulations for these species; and (d) tagging studies with break-away hooks for movement of tilefish.

6. Other: (a) An evaluation of redirection of fishing effort with area closures for black sea bass; (b) an evaluation of whether artificial reefs increase the productivity of black sea bass or simply concentrate the resource; (c) an evaluation of the mixing of Illex and Loligo squid in September and October; (d) increased and more representative sea sampling of the various fisheries in which summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass are caught (needed to adequately

characterize the length composition of the discards); (e) better estimates of discard mortality for the recreational and commercial fisheries (by gear type) for each species of Council-managed fish; (f) a study of summer flounder fecundity and why recruitment appears low as the resource is being rebuilt; (g) a study to develop optimum sampling levels to estimate discards of summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass; (h) increased and more representative port sampling of the various fisheries in which summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass are caught; (i) development of fishery independent surveys and expansion of existing surveys to capture all sizes and age classes of summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass in order to develop independent catch-at-age and catch per unit effort data; (j) expansion of age sampling of summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass from commercial and recreational catches, with special emphasis on collection of large specimens; (k) quantification of the percentage of commercial fishery trips that had discards but no landings, and evaluation of how such trips contribute to the total commercial fishery discard estimate; and (l) evaluation of fishery management actions, e.g., do closures have a net positive effect on fishing mortality by postponing such mortality, or do they simply allow for concentration of resources such that when the seasons open the consequent fishing effort offsets the mortality reductions that occurred during the closure?

C. Statutory Authority: Issuing grants is consistent with sections 303(b)(11), 402(e), and 404©) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1853(b)(11), 16 U.S.C. 1881a(e), and 16 U.S.C. 1881(c), respectively.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

No Federal funds are provided for research under this notification. The Federal Government may issue an EFP or Letter of Acknowledgment (LOA), as applicable, which may provide special fishing privileges in response to research proposals selected under this program. The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred in the conduct of the project. Any additional funds generated above the cost of the research activities (or excess program income) shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.

Funds generated from the RSA landings shall be used to cover the cost of the research activities, including vessel costs, and to compensate boats for expenses incurred during the collection of the set-aside species. For example, the funds could be used to pay for gear modifications, monitoring equipment, additional provisions (e.g., fuel, ice, food for scientists), or the salaries of research personnel. Therefore, the owner of each fishing vessel selected to land a species in excess of a trip limit or seasonal quota must use the proceeds of the sale of the excess catch to compensate the researcher for costs associated with the research activities and use of the vessel. The Federal Government is not liable for any costs incurred by the researcher or vessel owner, should the sale of the excess catch not fully reimburse the researcher or vessel owner for his/her expenses.

The Council, in consultation with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), will incorporate the level of RSA (amounts or percentages) for each of the set-aside species for the 2005 fishing year into the Council's recommendations for annual quota specifications. NMFS will consider the recommended level of RSA as part of the associated rulemaking process.

The actual level of RSA quota available to applicants for the 2005 fishing year will depend on the TAL level specified by the Council at its quota-setting meetings in June and August 2004, and on the percentage (0 to 3 percent) of the TAL recommended by the Council and approved by NMFS as the level of RSA available for 2005. To help researchers develop proposals for the 2005 fishing year, the table below provides some guidance on the general magnitude of RSA and estimated values that a researcher might expect to be available for fishing year 2005. The table is based on proposed RSA levels for these fisheries for the 2004 fishing year. The table is intended only as a guide, to be used when developing research proposals for the 2005 fishing year; it does not necessarily reflect the actual RSA quota that will be allocated for fishing year 2005. Based on Council recommendations, NMFS could choose to adopt less than 3 percent of TAL as a set-aside, or could decide not to adopt any set-aside for a given fishery. The estimated values of the set-aside allocations will vary depending on market considerations prevailing at the time the research trips are conducted. In October 2002, the Council voted to set the RSA for tilefish at zero until after a stock assessment is complete. However, tilefish RSA projects could be considered upon completion of a stock assessment and/or through utilizing of RSA quota from other species.

Table 1. Example of RSA Amounts, Based on 2004 Proposed Specifications.

Allocation Species	Pounds	Kilograms	Estimated Value(\$)
Summer Flounder	174,750	79,265	265,620
Scup	160,000	72,575	108,800
Black Sea Bass	134,792	61,141	318,372
<u>Loligo</u> Squid	281,250	127,572	180,000
<u>Illex</u> Squid	0	0	0
Atlantic Mackerel	0	0	0
Butterfish	0	0	0
Bluefish	297,750	135,057	101,235
Tilefish	0	0	0

B. Project/Award Period

The RSA harvest time frame must fall within January 1 through December 31, 2005. There may be times when compensation (in terms of the timing in harvest of the RSA) is not concurrent with the timing of the research. In general, under such situations, no more than 50 percent of the requested RSA should be harvested prior to the conduct of research activities. Proposals requesting RSA harvest prior to or after that time frame will not be considered.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

In consultation with NMFS, the NOAA Grants Office will award a grant to successful applicants through the NOAA grant award process.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, hospitals, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, State, local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice. Also, a person is not eligible to submit an application under this program if he/she is an employee of any Federal agency or a Regional Fishery Management Council. However, Council members who are not Federal employees may submit an application.

DOC/NOAA supports cultural and gender diversity in our programs and encourages women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications. In addition/ DOC/NOAA is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas. DOC/NOAA encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.

DOC/NOAA encourages applications from members of the fishing community, and applications that involve fishing community cooperation and participation.

A person is not eligible to submit an application under this program if he/she is an employee of any Federal agency or a Regional Fishery Management Council. However, Council members who are not Federal employees may submit an application.

To be eligible for consideration, a research proposal for work to be conducted using a RSA allocation for the 2005 fishing year must be received during the application submission period.

B. Permits and Approvals

It is anticipated that most proposals will request that vessels conducting research be exempt from certain regulations for the relevant fishery. The impacts of such an exemption must be analyzed. To streamline the process for the review and approval of Exempted Fishing Permit

(EFP) applications, the Council will prepare, as appropriate, an analysis of the impacts associated with the anticipated exemptions during the annual quota specification process. This process is intended to satisfy the analytical and public notice provisions of the EFP regulations at 50 CFR 600.745. However, certain conditions may require the applicant to provide additional analysis associated with such exemptions.

Should an applicant be required to submit a request for an EFP to NMFS, such submission should be received by NMFS at least 60 days before the requested start date of the proposed research to allow for additional review and analysis. No research or RSA harvest quota will be allowed until NMFS notifies the applicant that the applicant's EFP request is approved.

Applicants are urged to discuss with state fisheries agencies any proposed landings in their state(s). If any part of the proposed research activities occur in state waters, successful applicants, as a condition of project approval, will be required to provide NMFS with a copy of written documentation to demonstrate that the applicant has contacted the concerned state fishery management agency or agencies for any required state authorization. Note that requests for waivers of any state regulations will be forwarded to the appropriate state agency(s). NOAA cannot guarantee that state agencies will acceded to any particular request. Information on identity of state fishery management agencies is available from NMFS.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Electronic copies of the Standard Forms for submission of research proposals may be found on the Internet in a PDF (Portable Document Format) version at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html> under the title "Grants Management Division - Application Toolkit". Paper applications can be obtained by contacting Paul Perra, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930, or by phone at 978-281-9153, or fax at 978-281-9135, or via e-mail at Paul.Perra@noaa.gov.

B. Proposal Preparation and Requirements

NOAA employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not permitted to assist in the preparation of an application, except that staff may provide information on program goals, funding priorities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Since this is a competitive program, NMFS and NOAA employees will not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring proposals, or write letters of support for a proposal. However, the Council or NMFS contact person may provide assistance to researchers who are seeking vessels to participate in the collection of set-aside species or directly in research projects. NMFS, in consultation with the Council, may decide to hold a meeting with the public to discuss general topics concerning past RSA program accomplishments and ways to enhance communications on funding priorities and associated potential study methods. Such meetings

will be publicized by NMFS through a Federal Register notice, and through the public mailing list maintained by the Council office.

Proposals must identify the research to be conducted and the total amount of the set-aside species requested for the project, including its approximate cash value. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, a list of the specific regulations to be exempted and a brief justification for each regulation to be exempted must be included with the proposal.

C. Content and Form of Application Submission

Proposals must adhere to the three provisions under “Proposals” and the ten requirements under “Required Elements” by the deadline of April 8, 2004. Failure to follow these restrictions will result in proposals being returned to the applicant without review.

1. Proposals

a. Proposals submitted to the 2005 Mid-Atlantic Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program must include one signed original and two unbound copies of the proposal (including supporting information). Applicants must submit a Standard Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance), including a detailed budget using Standard Form 424A, (Budget Information--Non-Construction Programs), Standard Form 424B (Assurances-Non- Construction Programs), Commerce Department Form CD-511, (Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters: Drug-Free Workplace Requirements and Lobbying), and if applicable, Standard Form SF-LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities). Copies of these Standard Forms may be found on the Internet in a PDF version at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html>

b. Investigators are not required to submit more than three copies of the proposals. Investigators are encouraged to submit sufficient proposal copies of the full review process if they wish all reviewers to receive color, unusually sized (not 8.5x11), or otherwise unusual materials submitted as part of the proposal. Only an original version of the federally required forms and two copies of the proposal are needed.

c. Applicants must identify the specific research priority or priorities to which they are responding. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list first on the application the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of the proposal. For applications containing more than one project, each project component must be identified individually using the format specified in Required Elements. If an application is not in response to a priority, it should so state. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NMFS as the relative merits of the project described in the application.

2. Required Elements

Proposals should be limited to ten pages, excluding item “f” below. All proposals must include the following elements:

- a. A project summary
- b. A narrative project description to include: (1) Project goals and objectives; (2) the relationship of the proposed project to management needs or priorities identified by the Council (see Section I.B.); (3) a statement of work (project design and management, including who is responsible, expected products, and participants other than applicant); (4) Project duration (starting on the first day of the month and ending on the last day of the month); (5) Principal Investigator(s) (PI); and (6) a summary of the existing state of knowledge related to the project and contribution and relevance of the proposed work;
- c. A description of all funding sources (including revenues derived from the sale of the species harvested under the research quota set-aside) and funding needs. This element of the proposal must include the amount of RSA, in pounds, requested for each species and the expected funds to be generated by the sale of those species, as well as the expected funds to be allocated to the researcher and any involved fishing vessel.
- d. A budget that includes a breakdown of research costs, including, labor, vessel, permit, equipment, supplies, and overhead, as applicable.
- e. A list of any Federal or state regulations that the applicant needs to have waived and a brief justification for such a waiver. Applicants are urged to discuss with state fisheries agencies any proposed landings in their state(s). Note that requests for waivers of any state regulations will be forwarded to the appropriate state agency(s). NOAA cannot guarantee that state agencies will accede to any particular request.
- f. Supporting documents, including resumes, letters of intent for vessels to participate in research activities, and any relevant contracts.
- g. Proposals must identify the research to be conducted and the total amount of the set-aside species requested for the project, including its approximate cash value. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, a list of the specific regulations to be exempted and a brief justification for each regulation to be exempted must be included with the proposal.
- h. Each proposal must identify the RSA harvesting activities for the participating vessel(s) that would make a trip to collect the set-aside species. The vessel(s) selected by the applicant must be listed in the proposal, if possible, or specifically identified prior to final approval by NOAA. Proposals may request that the quota set-aside be collected separately from the research trips. The separate compensation trips do not necessarily have to be conducted by the same vessel. In general, compensation (in terms of the value of fish landed) should not exceed 2.5 times the cost of the associated research (See Evaluation Criterion 2 in Evaluation Criteria).

I. The researcher's proposal must state the amount of funds required to support the research project, including any costs for participation by project scientists or consultants, as well as the amount required to compensate the vessel owner either for the collection of set-aside species, or for participation in the research project, or both.

j. The proposal should also include the agreement between the applicant and participating vessel operators that shows exactly how the research activity is to be paid for, if possible, or such agreement must be provided prior to final approval by NOAA. Proposals that employ the use of multiple vessels to harvest the RSA allocation should provide a description of the safeguards that will be used to ensure that the RSA allocation will not be exceeded.

D. Other Requirements

The Council staff will bear the primary responsibility for the evaluations of impacts associated with the proposed research, including analysis of any requested regulatory exemptions. However, applicants proposing research and/or compensation fishing that goes beyond the scope of analysis provided by the Council staff in the Council's annual specification packages may be required to submit all information necessary for a Supplemental Environmental Assessment to obtain an EFP from NMFS. Should an applicant be required to submit a request for an EFP to NMFS, such submission should be received by NMFS at least 60 days before the requested start date of the proposed research to allow for additional review and analysis. A final decision on the applicant's grant request for research quota will not be made until NMFS has approved the applicant's EFP request.

If any part of the proposed research activities occur in state waters, successful applicants, as a condition of project approval, will be required to provide NMFS with a copy of written documentation to demonstrate that the applicant has contacted the concerned state fishery management agency or agencies for any required state authorization. Information on identity of state fishery management agencies is available from NMFS.

E. Submission Dates and Times

Proposals must be received by Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930, on or before 5 p.m., April 8, 2004. Mark proposals "Attention--Mid-Atlantic Research Proposals."

F. Funding Restrictions

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of October 1, 2001 (66 FR 49917), as amended by the Federal Register notice published on October 30, 2002 (67 FR 66109), are applicable to this solicitation.

The RSA harvest time frame must fall within January 1 through December 31, 2005. There may be times when compensation (in terms of the timing in harvest of the RSA) is not concurrent with the timing of the research. In general, under such situations, no more than 50 percent of the requested RSA should be harvested prior to the conduct of research activities. Proposals requesting RSA harvest prior to or after that time frame will not be considered.

The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred in the conduct of the project. Any additional funds generated above the cost of the research activities (or excess program income) shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The review panel convened by NMFS to evaluate proposals submitted in response to this RFP (see Selection Procedures of this notice), will evaluate proposals by assigning scores up to the maximum indicated for each of the following criteria:

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the 2005 RSA program, provide a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or hypothesis to be addressed. The proposal should describe its relevance to RSA program priorities. If not directly related to priorities listed in this solicitation, provide justification why the proposed project should be considered. (25 points)
2. Technical/scientific merit: This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Special emphasis will be given to proposals that foster and improve cooperative interactions with NMFS. A clear definition of the approach to be used, including description of field work, theoretical studies, and laboratory analysis to support the proposed research, and the ability of the applicant to physically complete RSA harvest during the 2005 calendar year in the area and time proposed is important. The time frame for harvesting the RSA catch and conducting the proposed research should be clearly specified. Activities that take place over a wider versus narrower geographical range, where appropriate, are preferred. (25 points)
3. Overall qualifications of the project: This criterion assesses whether the applicant, and team members, possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This includes demonstration of support, cooperation and/or collaboration with the fishing industry, and qualifications/experience of project participants. Where appropriate, unified versus separate stand-alone proposals on related projects involving multiple principal investigators are preferred. For proposals involving multiple vessels harvesting RSA, special attention will be given to specification of safeguards to ensure that the

authorized RSA allocation will not be exceeded. (15 points)

4. Project costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For the 2005 RSA program, cost-effectiveness of the project is considered. The requested value of the anticipated revenue from the RSA should be commensurate with estimated project costs, and generally should not exceed 2.5 times the cost of the associated research. Economic and budget projections should be quantified, to the extent possible. Where appropriate, use of existing equipment (fishing gear) is preferred versus acquisition of new equipment.(25 points)

5. Outreach and education: This criterion assesses whether the project involves a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This includes identification of anticipated benefits, potential users, likelihood of success, and methods of disseminating results. Where appropriate, data generated from the research must be formatted in a manner consistent with NMFS and Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistical Program (ACCSP) databases. A copy of this format is available from NMFS. (10 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

NMFS will solicit written technical evaluations from the Council members who make up the Research Set-Aside Committee (Committee) and from three or more appropriate private and public sector experts to score proposals using the criteria specified in Project Funding Priorities of this notification to determine the technical merit of the proposal. Following completion of the technical evaluation, NMFS will convene a review panel, including the Committee and technical experts, to review and individually critique the scored proposals to enhance NOAA's understanding of the proposals. Initial successful applicants may be required, in consultation with NMFS, to further refine/modify study methodology as a condition of project approval. No consensus recommendations will be made. Based on the results of the technical review's comments and scores, comments provided by the review panel, and the following program policy factors, NMFS will conditionally select the successful proposals and inform the Council of its recommendations.

The selecting official may choose a proposal out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors: (1) Availability of funds; (2) Balance/distribution of funds; (a) Geographically, (b) by type of institutions, (c) by type of patterns, (d) by research areas, and (e) by project types; (3) whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies; (4) program priorities and policy factors; (5) Applicant's prior award performance; (6) Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups. Key program policy factors are: (1) The time of year the research activities are to be conducted; (2) the ability of the proposal to meet the experimental fishery requirements discussed under Other Requirements of this notice; and (3) redundancy of research projects. Therefore, the highest scoring projects may not necessarily be selected for an award. Subsequent approval by

the NOAA Grants Officer will allow NMFS, as applicable, to exempt selected vessel(s) from specific regulations implementing the respective FMPs through written notification to the applicant.

For proposals that request exemptions from existing regulations (e.g., possession limits, closed seasons), the impacts of the proposed exemptions must be analyzed. The Council will analyze these impacts as part of the impacts of the proposed specifications for the upcoming fishing year in the annual quota specification packages it submits to NMFS. However, those individuals with proposals that include vessel activities that extend beyond the scope of the analysis provided by the Council may be required to provide additional analysis before issuance of an EFP. Any applicants who request regulatory exemptions that are beyond the scope of the Council analysis may be required to adhere to the regulations that govern the issuance of an EFP by NMFS. As appropriate, NMFS will consult with the Council and successful applicants to secure the information required for granting an exemption, if issuance of an EFP is necessary for the research to be conducted. No research or RSA harvest quota will be allowed until NMFS notifies the applicant that the applicant's EFP request is approved.

C. Final Reports and Data Submission

NOAA will require project researchers to submit to NOAA, with a copy for the Council, semi-annual progress reports and a comprehensive final completion report describing their research project results, and other acceptable deliverable(s), in a time frame that is specific to the type of research conducted. The format of the report may vary, but must contain:

1. A brief summary of the completion report (200-word or less abstract);
2. A description of the issue/problem that was addressed;
3. A detailed description of methods of data collection and analyses;
4. A discussion of results and any relevant conclusions presented in a format that is understandable to a non-technical audience. This should include benefits and/or contributions to management decision-making.
5. A list of entities, firms, or organizations that actually performed the work and a description of how the work was accomplished; and
6. A detailed final accounting of all funds used to conduct research, including generation of project income resulting from sale of RSA quota. The financial information must be submitted on Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Standard Form-269 (Financial Status Report). Copies of this Standard Form may be found on the Internet in a PDF version at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html>. Projects designed to collect new data for inclusion in NMFS or ACCSP databases must submit the data in electronic format with appropriate documentation. Certain databases will have highly specific requirements as to required fields and content. Applicants must agree to provide newly collected data in a format acceptable to the administrators of the receiving databases.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of RSA quota, review of proposals will occur during the two months following the date given in this announcement that the proposals are due to NMFS. Initiation of approved RSA project activities should begin during Spring 2005 for most projects. January 1, 2005 should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been recommended for selection to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not an authorization to begin performance on the project. Official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. Notifications will be issued to the Authorizing Official and the Principal Investigator of the project. It is provided by postal mail to the appropriate business office of the recipient organization.

NMFS will notify unsuccessful applicants, in writing, by postal mail. If an application is not selected, NOAA will return the proposal and related documents to the applicant.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Administrative and national policy requirements for all Department of Commerce awards are contained in the Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of October 1, 2001 (66 FR 49917), as amended by the Federal Register notice published on October 30, 2002 (67 FR 66109). You may obtain a copy of these by notices by contacting the agency contact(s) under Section VII, or by going to the website at: www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html. Applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact should furnish sufficient information to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project.

C. Reporting

Award recipients will be required to submit financial and performance (technical) reports . All financial reports shall be submitted in triplicate (one original and two copies) to the NOAA Grants Officer.

Performance reports shall be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer. Electronic submission of performance reports is preferred. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. A comprehensive final report is due 90 days after the award expires.

VII. Council and Agency Contact(s)

Information may be obtained from Daniel Furlong, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, (302) 674-2331, fax (302) 674-5399, or e-mail cheaton@mafmc.org, or Paul Perra, Fishery Policy Analyst, NMFS, (978) 281-9153, fax 978-281-9135, e-mail paul.perra@noaa.gov.